

Installation as a Sensory Vessel

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Artist Statement

I work to connect our contemporary phenomenological awareness to the primal origins of Earth, and humanity by utilizing video mapping, sound, sculptural papermaking and installation. Through this connection, I create sensory experiences to increase the viewer's awareness to their physical body and its causation.

The tectonic plates of earth are in constant movement, floating on magma. The earth cracks and presses, creating mountain ranges and valleys. Water rushes in filling the crevasses, changing jagged bedrock into smooth curves, turning the seabed into a dry salt covered desert. The shift of the earth can be felt and the objecthood of a mountain range cannot be denied. Our origins are buried deep in the earth, creating a relationship between the self and the flesh of existence. The sensing matter of humanity is apodictic; confirmation is received from the nervous system as it interacts with primal environments, symbols, textures, and sounds. This information is processed phenomenologically, shaping how we think, communicate, and develop. As our contemporary minds grow further away from our intuition, we must look to the roots of our origin stories and how they merge with our modern sense of the sublime.

Visual and Ideological Analysis of Work

The first installation in my thesis body of work is entitled, *Fibra Huid*¹; this translates as fiber hide and its secondary meaning speaks to filaments, internal organs and mammal skin. By using both the Latin and Dutch languages in my titles I reference the origin of my research focus through my personal northern European genetic history.

European ancient history is interwoven with ritualized traditions. Pre-Christian neolithic cultures created objects and symbols that communicated their concept that humans are part of a greater regenerative life cycle. Birth, Life, and Death are aspects of existence, and we are still not separate from this today. The sublime is nested among each aspect of life and death, allowing individuals to cultivate their own focus in this life. My practice focuses on temporary place-making, developing environments that give each viewer a place to develop their own personal embodiment.

Each of *Fibra Huid's* hanging mobiles is sculpted with abaca fiber pulp, embedding cotton blend thread and vines found in local forests.¹ The strength and cohesion of paper fiber relies on the length of the micro fibers of the plant itself. Abaca is known for its strength and luster, both of which come from the long microfibers. This fiber is harvested from a cousin to the banana tree and is primarily found in the Philippines and Ecuador, but also present in hot desert environments, such as the middle east.³ When the unbleached abaca pulp dries it loses 40% to 50% of its volume, condensing itself into organic, nearly unpredictable forms. This contraction torques the vines into abstracted animalistic forms that remind us of skin and bone. This visceral connection to mammal hide is exemplified by the stretched surface and cavities present in the mobiles.

Dependant on the thickness of the pulp application, the sculpture can be rough and hard or softly smooth and translucent. The texture ingrained in the core of the paper intentionally relates to the patina of caves and the textured surfaces of ancient European temples. If you look closely you begin to see the press and indentation of many hands in the abaca fiber itself. This texture directs us further to the hand-body connection exhibited in the flesh of the sculpture. The

naturally colored threads are bundled by hand creating a form that describes both animal hair and the pre-processed abaca fiber. Collections of cotton thread hangs off the paper-hide forms reaching down toward the ground and pooling onto the floor.

Each sculpture is hung at different levels; some are far above and others are at eye-level with the viewer(s). The draping threads are braided to create a comparison to the organic elements within the aesthetic characteristics of the mobile, showing evidence of the human hand. The braids create a textured 'zip' from the attachment at the ceiling, all the way through the piece to the floor. This braided texture is consistent throughout each mobile in the installation. Each bundle of thread is grouped and itself bundled, creating texture throughout the installation.

The nine individual mobiles are suspended to create an interactive environment; a walkable experience through its section within the gallery space. The mobiles' shadows extend across the gallery floors and up onto the walls. Each object has an organic shape, allowing the diverse sizes and form to visually relate; the shadow cast by each form create a visual consistency. The translucency gives the abaca bodies a second inner form, once again establishing the connection of the outer-life to inner transformation. The sinew-like quality is highlighted by the thread and natural objects embedded like bones and capillaries.

Each mobile is lit at an angle from overhead sources, enforcing an interaction with the luminosity of the fleshy objects. The combination of the abaca's ivory colored translucency and the embedded objects relate us back to our bodies, leather, flesh and bone in diverse ways. Some viewers revel in the hair like fibers and the aesthetic of the luminous paper, while others find their own skin 'crawling' and are encouraged to engage with that sensation. The physiological

experiences that participants acquire through interacting with my installations is the overall goal. When a sensing body is engaged in any manner, I feel that the *Fibra Huid* has done its work.

For my solo thesis installation, *Sono Ignis^V*, I acquired a space within the Stutz Art Galleries. With each new installation, with video or any other medium, you must shift the contents presentation, goals and physical arrangement in order for the show to succeed. This adaptability is a key part of my artistic practice and one thing that draws me to site-specific installation work. My approach to video work is rooted in creating a participatory space for the viewer, and a collaborative space with other artists. My desire to transform passive viewers into active participants shaped *Sono Ignis*’ layout design and how its space was utilized.

Three of my fire study videos are projected in sequence, within three looping channels, with a 13 minute and 31 second cycle. As the viewer enters the “L” shaped space they begin to see lights and sparks reflect on the walls of the entry way and a video projected onto the left wall. As the viewers move more deeply within the space, they begin to see their own shadows appear within the projection. The light of the video reflects and shifts onto the viewers as they move throughout the gallery, highlighting each person's features with a radiant fire-orange earthen spectrum. The play of light and shadow on the walls and floor allows the viewer to feel surrounded by the installation. This visual inclusion is indicated not only by the projections reflecting off the viewer, but also through the shadows of the individuals on the walls around them. These shadows simultaneously block the projectors’ light, while allowing the space to be filled by the same looping video projecting through at a different angle. This overlapping of projections abstracts the viewer's shadow and creates a unique depth that continues to shift with the exhibition.

The three videos within the loop are *Flame Rights*^{II}, *Fire Dancer*^{III}, and *Fire Apparatus*^{IV}. Each video is purposefully aligned to be slightly off from the other. This method of layering video in the space creates a unified front and allows each video the time to stand as a unique channel. The transitions between each video is slow, allowing for the viewer to notice the change causally.

Each channel plays the same 13 minute and 31 second video, starting with *Flame Rights*: a single flame projected to be larger than the viewer, which flickers back and forth across the space. This recording is displayed in real time and moves at a fast speed creating an interminably illuminated light that flows across the space and viewers. The layering of sound and images starts then. The room is dark as the first channel chimes and reveals *Flame Rights* upside down; this presents a space not based within realism, but rather within abstraction. This is followed by *Flame Rights* appearing on the other two video channels which are matched with accompanying tones. Several minutes later, just when viewers have become accustomed to the pace and orientation of the single flame, the upside-down channel brings in an abstracted rotation of glowing orbs. In the minutes following, each video begins to sync with the others; the three channels fill the gallery space with rotating orbs.

Fire Dancer^{III} is recorded by using the Bokeh effect which is created through intentionally recording a luminous subject out of focus. The moving images fall in and out of recognisability, sometimes revealing an amorphous figure spinning fire. This popular photographic technique is used to create a deep refraction on each point of flame, light and reflection. The rounding effect of light under the bokeh technique transforms the fire dancer into an abstracted elemental signifier. The figure folds in and out of legibility as its darkness

overtakes the optics in an organic manner. This makes the dancer seem to be as tenuous as the fire, never quite allowing us to associate ourselves to its image at the same time as our shadows already being part of it.

The image within *Flame Rights*^{II} and *Flame Apparatus*^{IV} is isolated against a black background. A structure fire flickers and expands creating sparks and embers across darkened space. The cropping of the photographic frame inhibits the crumbling structure (required to create such a large fire) from view, which allows the smaller details of the fire to become most dominant within the composition. The ensuing sparks subtly cover the room, emerging for only part of the collective video cycle of the channels.

The combination of the different fire based imagery supports the idea of a primal collective essence, rather than individual occurrence. By projecting onto multiple surfaces the surrounding space itself becomes a vessel. There is a physical need to move carefully through the dark space and a desire to either rest or interact with each moving image at its many angles. As the viewers find a place to settle or explore, the sound takes on more power.

The prominent sound of *Sono Ignis* is comprised of tones made from a tuning fork being struck; this is followed by the crackling of a large fire. These different sounds ocellate through the installation space leaving both spaces of silence and overlapping audio. Some of the imagery is clear and easily defined, while other imagery is more abstracted and harder to reach. This unification of sound and imagery creates a resonance throughout the piece giving the footage a meditative quality. The level of sound shifts with the level of illumination and varies as each video subject pulses in and out of the unseen frame. There are moments of brightness and

moments where the darkness overtakes the space, allowing the harmonic tone of a tuning fork to emerge.

Sono Ignis translates as sound fire, with a deeper semiotic meaning of bells pealing, and ignition. This installation works to connect our physiological awareness to humanity's collective primal origins by utilizing video and sound to create a sensory experience. Sound buries itself into our memories, working to interconnect our synapse with or without our awareness. Fire is recognized as an essential element to the development of civilization and culture. Despite humanity's long acquaintance with this element, fire maintains its enigmatic power. Both ancient and modern culture holds fire as causation for festivals, ritual, and ceremony.

Participation is automatic for anyone who steps into the space and works to support the sense that they are part of this greater whole. As the images and lights hit their bodies, they become part of the installation. As they hear the sounds and relate to them individually, they become part of the whole. The concept of inclusion in *Life* is not based on choice: if you are alive, you are part of *Life* as a whole. Thus, if a viewer enters the space, they automatically become a participant. This creates the opportunity to feel a personal connection to the transformational imagery.

Phenomenology and Historical Context

In order to record these connections to sensation, I translate not only the oversaturated physicality of these moments, but the emotional shift that follows. As modern humans we have an abundance of scientific information about the very earth we stand on, yet the disambiguation between ourselves and the planet robs us of the sensation of “being”. This effectual feeling

motivates the progression of a “sensing” culture by cultivating our connection to existence itself. In this way, contemplation of the primal beginning of life is directly complementary to the present day and age. This route of thought takes us deeper into the exploration of what we personally have in common with our abiogenic beginnings, and how it holds fertile grounds for universal self-recognition.

“Givenness” is the integrative moment of experience that somehow never leaves our perception, yet it is uncontainable.⁷ A deep physical feeling of “Givenness” is an embodiment of the experience of our surroundings. The lived experience of “Givenness” holds an affective quality that teaches the individual to trust their perception and be guided by their senses. Each time an individual enacts a recognition of the sublime moment, a memory is created, which creates a neural link to all other stored encounters. Memory informs our perception and guides our day-to-day interactions. The punctum contained in nature itself is unquestionable, and is proven by our drive to define certain locations as sacrosanct, and this search for the truth that is contained in experience is non-comparative. This presents an opportunity for transcendental self-development which is only available through personal interactivity with the world. The “...apodictic truths in phenomenology are not merely formal statements, rather they make up a complex web and have a layered meaning”.⁵ It is not just our decisions or social actions that give the land objecthood, but the physical sensations that we receive by being present within that space. The pure ability of wonderment engages the undefinable inside us and gives us proof of who we are and where we stand.

Through art and ritual, humanity strives to explain what they hold most sensational. The “givenness of being” that is contained in a symbol or object can invoke societal change.^{4,5}

Symbols can enact phenomena, as well as indicate paths to it. Moran calls our attention “...back to the things themselves” linking into Husserl’s statement of experience in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. “Experience is the performance in which for me, the experiencer, experienced being...” indicating in part that the “primary act” is not subject to formal scientific justifications, but rather is lead by our intuitive guidance and emotions.⁵

Within Moran's treatise on Phenomenology he links each of the studied philosopher's ideas to their consideration of Aristotle's, *De Anima*. The discussion on how our mind-body relates to the senses is fascinating to philosophers because physical sensations are both apodictic and completely unprovable. Aristotle states at the end of *De Anima, Book I* that “...the affections of soul are inseparable from the material substratum of animal life.”¹ The idea that the “Soul” is that gut level unquestionable sensation that can not be located or proven, but unendingly guides us forward. Aristotle's sum of his contemporaries’ theories is defined through the “mind...sensation”, of which the “Form of Things” is created.^{1,5} This is the concept that the soul is provable through the physical forces of originative movement and their own objecthood. This supports Phenomenologies’ idea of firsthand experience, which is not dictated by social constructs, beliefs or science; the way to understanding is through a gut level intuition that is then analysed against a larger whole.

Phenomenology itself is “...a practice rather than a system..”; it addresses the need for the truth of the experiencer to be heard and cultivated.⁷ This separation from externally imposed thought patterns and unbending traditions can be used to reactivate ancient cultures recognition and celebration of the full cycle of life. Ancient ritual, at its core, comes not from an instruction manual, but from the need to express and communicate the importance of an act or location.

These acts hold sensation at their core and continue based upon personal experience through mind-body-earth connection. This recognition of ritual as a method-act of learning through sensation, holds our perception of ritual and religious doctrine as separate ideas. Our ability to perceive birth, life, and death stands as a predecessor to all conception of stagnated doctrines.

The use of art, ritual, and storytelling all started as an attempt to communicate what our givenness has taught us so far. The mystery of birth, of discovery, and of death are passed down through these interactive qualities. These acts create the space for the givenness to be felt rather than regurgitated based upon *a priori* learning.

This exemplifies societies deep roots in learned experience in order to propagate each culture. The fittest concept follows its collective knowledge to the next logical development. As humanities' experiences become more complex, mark-making and creation take on greater importance. Symbols are part of our way of communication and expression of this sensation-knowledge. We use them to communicate the truths we have each found self-evident. Ritual as a space of experience, rather than rhetoric, holds a natural transitional effect. The water in the river flows down the path of least resistance, always.

This rhythmic progress of our human experience supports the development of traditions to teach the path back to that core sensation. Storytelling, art and ritual are linked through the use of iconic representation. The way that we develop our broader cultural identities is fundamentally like the water smoothing its path as it flows through the softest locations. The origins of culture and ritual stem from this same evolutionary precept. Our personal experience of life relates to the decisions of our ancestors. These ancestors worked through symbols and signs, creating language to pass on oral traditions through the generations as knowledge and

population grew. The functionality of these stories were merged with the sacred and the aesthetic qualities available to them in their times.

This primal fascination with creation and communication leads my art to consider how contemporary art relates to this pursuit of core-sensations. Proto-Indo European cultures constantly left evidence of symbols that expressed their fascination with birth, life, sexuality, and death.³ As artists we equally reflect what seems most visceral or real to us in order to process our ideas and emotions.

Caves and Temples are held as sacred sites for the ancient people. The textures and figures found in these locations work to represent not only deities, but the worshipers themselves, communicating a story about the importance of this location and how individuals should interact within the location. This shows through still today in modern culture as we whisper in places that contain a “sensing-body”.⁵ It can be seen as we explore landscapes, visit cathedrals, graveyards, libraries, museums, galleries, and meet important individuals. Places that hold natural or historical awareness offer us a connection to our physical-spiritual self. The stories Paleolithic people held important are depicted in glyphs and patterns on walls and pottery. Although these objects were held as important, they also show signs of physical handling. This indicates that they were both held sacred and touched.⁴ In contemporary visual methodologies what is being touched and the wear of the object in question gives it visual importance. This representation of activity translates into a record of the physical worship of the object's representation. Transitional objects are used as touch stones to remind of locations, people, situations and ideas. While psychology talks indepth about transitional objects, such as a

childhood blanket, culturally we can ascribe spiritual symbology to these objects. This then translates into symbols as transitional object contained within social evolution.

Biographical

Art is my way of a “reintegrative forming of forms...to become an aid to the cognition that has material content”.⁵ It is my belief that through a balance of historical context, material understanding, and experiential awareness, artists can thrive living a creative-life practice. My personal artistic practice includes: visual making, ecological and historical studies, mind-body awareness, embodied spirituality, and secular education. These practices support the development of my socio-philosophical understanding, which in turn, directly informs my image and object making. My conceptual and physical awareness willingly catalyze to create a creative self reliance. In my life I work to cultivate information about the landscape, sacred space, and the connection between archeology and contemporary anthropology. This meeting between experiential data and learned information allows for intuitive creation in my making. I use this melding to create artistic studies relating to my personal connection to the landscape and humanity's collective concepts of symbology. Through cultivation of this interconnection with life I put myself alone into locations that are held as places of transformation through which interactivity of the individual create the sensation of givenness. Seeking this experience in the subtly expansive and uniquely profound, I present my personal creative practice as an offering to that undefinable agent. I travel to UNESCO marked locations, Native American sacred sites, and internationally recognised historic markers across the USA, Central America, and Southern Europe to learn as close to first hand information about the history of our collective spiritual

history. This work describes the effects of holding something sacred, which is separate from religious doctrine, and how that ancient understanding can reassert itself into our contemporary lives. To replace the unretrievable actions of rituals that are lost within ancient cultures, I enact connection with the heritage that is left behind.

Conclusion

The concept that “universality” must link to and be validated by “...an ultimate extensional relation of applicability to individuals...”⁵ tells us of the aid that experience can have to the cognition of facts. If we are not able to approach the “objects themselves” for their own sensation-based qualities, we will also be incapable of teleological study. This individualized viewpoint is where collective data is sourced. These “...aspect[s] of experience which cannot be fully articulated...”⁵ are able only to be described in the phenomenological approach. Thus the sensation-based truth of experience in birth, life, and death, which are integral to understanding nature, must be *felt* first hand.

The answer of the widespread question of life’s purpose is, perhaps, best answered through the universality of phenomenological sensation. These sensations are individually felt, yet resonate through the centuries, leaving their mark on our stories, art, ritual, and culture. These referent marks have changed us physically, mentally, and spiritually. Our ethics and philosophy are linked to the creation of symbols and our reflexion against them.

My art practice as a whole focuses on cultivating an individual experience for my viewers. Returning to the individual sensing can put us in a place to better understand our collective importance on this planet. The problems in the contemporary world that are related to

dissociative practices, environmentally and socially, are surmountable through developing individual self-awareness. Both *Fibra Huid* and *Sono Ignis* installations, use light and space as an artistic tool. My function as an artist has been achieved through the creation of interactive and detailed time-based environments. This personal interactivity is evident in the way that viewers create their own stories and connections with each art piece. This personal storytelling links firmly back to humanity's beginning and our collective cultural origins.

Through the re-examination of these primal causalities, we as a culture will be better able to understand how we arrived where we are today. This contemporary reflection is multifaceted, allowing us to process both the old and the new in order to arrive in a more encompassing knowledge than our origins. The truth of our mind-body link can rejuvenate an empathy that is lacking in today's global culture. This in turn has the ability to create a sacred space for our ongoing development on this planet.

Appendix

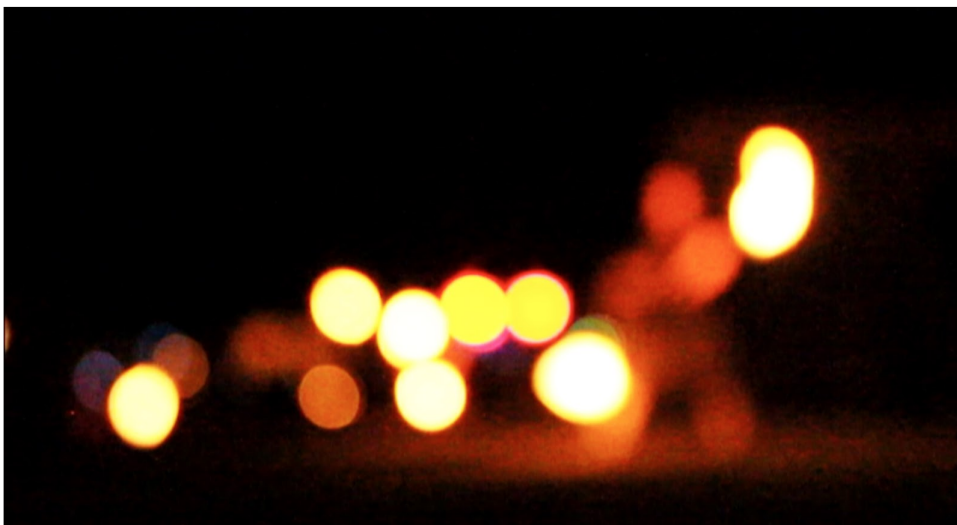
¹ Fibra Huid Documentation



^{II} *Flame Rights*, still



^{III} *Fire Dancer* still



^{IV} *Flame Apparatus* still



^V Sono Ignis documentation



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